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Incel Ideology and Terrorism

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Solicitor-Client Priv. Incels belong to a misogynistic community of males, who associate primarily through online platforms. They are not an organized group and have no centralized structure or planning. They

"Ideology as a concept refers to a coherent view of the world, but the way it is used in the debate about disengaging violent extremists usually means ideology as a set of ideas, opinions or a narrative; providing individuals with an identity, a purpose, a sense of significance, 'brotherhood'."

Liesbeth van der Heide, Senior Researcher for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, April 2018

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believe their genetics determine the quality of their life and relationships, and blame their unattractive physical features for their inability to attract women. Incels attribute their perceived failings in life to women and society in general. The Incel subculture uses a unified terminology to describe both members of their community and those towards whom they hold grievances⁴. s.38

A number of adherents to the Incel ideology, have been inspired to engage in acts of mass violence as a result of their beliefs. This is perhaps owing to the idea that the group's ideology may generate or shape active motives that create the desire to commit violence and generate perceptions or beliefs that make violence seem permissible.⁵ This was certainly the case for some of the recent Incel perpetrators, including Alek Minassian⁶, whose perception and beliefs in Incel ideology were the root cause of his attack; Minassian defended his actions, stating they were carried out for the greater cause, an Incel Rebellion⁷. Elliot Rodger's⁸ beliefs also shaped his motives and made his violence seem more permissible. He justified his engagements as a "revenge on society" for what he perceived as the ultimate injustice – his lack of success with women. He wanted to punish and torture those around him who were not suffering as he was. s.3

The Incel ideology, in the broadest sense, can be articulated as a somewhat coherent worldview in which individuals have unique narratives, and hold diverse and complex grievances that can motivate them to take action. According to Liesbeth van der Heide, a Senior Researcher for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), it is not whether we think ideology matters; it matters because those that use violence in the name of ideology (violent fringe within the Incel subculture) tell us it matters to them. This idea was reiterated by Alek Minassian throughout his interview with police following his attack. Minassian described his beliefs in the Incel ideology and how those beliefs led him to plan and carry out his attack. s.38

How Incel ideology may be considered within the general terrorism offence framework

There is a considerable amount of open-source information and academic research that describes how Incel ideology conforms to the definition of terrorism. For example, a recent Lawfare article described Incel-motivated violence as "indisputably terroristic", pointing out that it bears all the standard components of extremist beliefs, including an "in group" (the group to which an extremist belongs -sexually deprived Incels) and an "out group" (the group targeted by the extremists group - Chads and Stacy's). s.3

"By advocating bloodshed as a means of broader societal intimidation, Incel ideology conforms to the core definition of terrorism as violence designed to have far-reaching psychological effects."

Incels: America's Newest Domestic Terrorism Threat, Lawfare, January 2020

The authors argue that it is an accessible subculture, one whose ideology does not require training in arcane religious doctrine or indoctrination through complex political texts; rather, it takes advantage of feelings of loneliness and sexual frustrations and weaponizes these feelings into a hateful ideology that results in some adherents committing attacks against women and, in some instances, men. s.3

According to the ICCT, the motivation for terrorist attacks within secular male supremacist communities stems predominantly from two core misogynist beliefs. The idea that men are entitled to sexual access to women, a belief Incels

⁴ The terminology outlines that 'Stacy's' are the idealized women they desire but believe deny them sex, and 'Chads,' are the similarly idealized males who are hated for corraling all the apparently best women for themselves.

⁵ Ideological Transmission in extremists contexts: Towards a Framework of How Ideas are Shared

⁶ On April 23, 2018, Alek Minassian drove a rented van along Yonge Street in Toronto, deliberately targeting pedestrians, killing 10 and injuring 16.

⁷ The term "Incel Rebellion" is sometimes used interchangeably with the term "Beta Uprising", which refers to a violent response to incels' perceived sexual deprivation.

⁸ Elliot Rodger, who identified with Incels, killed six people and injured fourteen others on May 2014, near the campus of University of California, Santa Barbara, before killing himself. He has since been adopted as a "Saint" and a hero by individuals within the Incel community.

have used to justify mass violence as retribution for being denied sex, and the belief that feminists are controlling society at the expense of men, a principle widely shared by members of the Manosphere⁹. s.3

The Texas Department of Public Safety views Incels as an emerging domestic terrorism threat, since current adherents demonstrate acts or threats of violence in furtherance of their social grievance and owing to the ideological nature of Incel attacks. The Department argues that that what begins as a personal grievance due to perceived rejection by women may morph into attempts to further an Incel Rebellion. Furthermore, there is a concern that the violence demonstrated by Incels since 2014, coupled with extremely violent online rhetoric, could equate to—or potentially surpass—the level of lethality demonstrated by other domestic terrorism attacks¹⁰. IAB assesses that this could certainly be the case in Canada, as four of the eight ideologically motivated violent (IMV) extremism attacks since 2014 have been committed by individuals motivated, in whole or in part, by Incel ideology. Twelve individuals were killed during those four attacks alone. s.3

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⁹The manosphere is an online network of blogs, subreddits, Facebook groups, and forums centred around hatred, anger and resentment of feminism.

¹⁰The Department of Public Safety, Texas Domestic Terrorism Threat Assessment, January 2020

¹¹Refer to Solicitor-Client Priv. for more information on the Incel subculture

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Implications/Considerations

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Although prior to more recent events, we are aware of only one other incel related prosecution,¹² TAB assesses that, as with the case of the Toronto perpetrator¹³ whose attack, according to open sources, is being treated as an act of terrorism, future attacks inspired, fully or in part, by incel ideology may be persecuted in a similar way. s.38

¹²In January 2019, Christopher Cleary planned a mass shooting at a women's march in Provo Utah, intending to kill "as many girls as I see". On April 2019, Cleary pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of attempted threat of terrorism under section 107.3 of the Utah Criminal code. His conviction marked the first ever terrorism charge given to a male perpetrator motivated primarily by misogyny and male sexual entitlement. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment.

¹³On April 24, 2020, a minor entered the Crown Spa (an erotic massage parlor), located near Dufferin Street and Wilson Avenue in Toronto, and stabbed two women, killing one of them and injuring the other.

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